

THESIS,

DISFRANCHISEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES,

FOR THE DEGREE OF



IN THE SCHOOL OF MODERN LANGUAGES,

BY

Z. Lincoln Whitmire,

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Legislating, in the United States, particularly since the laboring class has come to the front with such numerous demands in that line, has become a question of some importance. The great cry of the laboring class has been, "Better Legislation"; and "Legislation for the laborer". This cry would never have arisen had there have been nothing wrong. Whatever it is, it affects the the laborer in the end. If the trouble can be traced to its origin, and the proper remedy applied, a cure can be effected; but not until then.

There is no doubt but that our system of government is the best that has ever been practiced, but it fails in its purpose, in as much as complete satisfaction is not given; and, as it is a representative government, the fault lies with the people, who make and execute the laws.

In considering the subject, the first thing to be noticed is our political parties. A political party is unavoidable in a representative government; and though it is productive of

good as a regulator, yet with us it is one of the chief sources of the existing evils. It governs the voter, and guides and protects the lawgiver. It is the master hand in the great machinery of our government, and makes party men wherever it touches; men who, as voters, stand by the party in wrong as well as right; and as legislators, disgrace the name by legislating for their party, and cast a reflection upon themselves by the lack of principle displayed; men who waste valuable moments over foolish party arbitrations, and draw the hard earned money of the people ~~for~~ as a remuneration.

Since the nature of the laws is to a great extent dependent upon, and influenced by, the character of the lawgivers, let us consider the different elements that go to make up our legislative bodies. In our state legislatures we find men not only lacking in the qualifications that the position seems to demand, but even in those qualifications that seem essential to an ordinary man. There are those who are dependent

upon their constituents, and, feeling this, legislate accordingly. One of this class will vote strictly with the party on all matters of party differences; but on affairs of minor importance he will vote as seems best to suit his interests. He is a party man and now Congress is filled with just such men.

Next is the pure policy man. He has attained his office and now wishes to hold it, or to advance in the political field. There is nothing too mean for him to undertake; and he scruples at nothing, so long as it seems advantageous to the accomplishment of his desired end. He works for the capitalist to-day, the poor man to-morrow, and if you are a man of political influence, for any measure you may wish brought forward, you may be assured of his immediate and hearty indorsement.

This is what I consider a fair description of our lawgivers. It is true we have, and always have had, some few men of whom

it can be said, they have always acted irrespective of party and their own interests. With our legislative bodies constituted as they are now, and with such characters as their leaders, what better results can be expected? When capital, political influence and personal ambition guide the very acts and thoughts of our lawgivers; then such laws as these may desire, we shall have. All bills that pass the houses are not supposed to affect the whole people, not to be directly beneficial to the government; but at the same time such as are passed of individual importance should have some just and worthy reason for having been passed. For instance, the bills that come before Congress at every session, for the expenditure of money. Money is paid out of the public treasury for private and personal matters, almost without a question as to the real needs of the case; but let a ^{bill} of public importance come up, one that affects the moral or educational interests of the country, and unless

there can be seen some way, in the handling of the money, by which they themselves or their friends may personally profit, there will be scarcely one assenting voice.

Nor is the trouble limited to the Legislative department of the government, but it extends to the Judicial. Of what value is it to have laws that touch every phase of existing evil, when such laws are not carried into practical effect? Or what good is accomplished by legislating against evil, when in the execution of the laws greater evils are perpetrated in the name of Justice, than those evils to which the laws refer? The object of law is, that justice, through the courts, may be administered; but when the the courts fail in their duty, justice is not administered, and the object of the law is not attained. Through the wording of the laws, the instructions of our judges, the quibblings of our lawyers and the proverbial ignorances of our juries, there has arisen a feeling of uncertainty concerning the results of the most important cases, that has ultimately resulted in frequent requests for change of venue, and in the present

prevalence of Lynch-law: while in the end the lawyers are the only ones who profit by the transaction. The fact alone that Lynch-law is resorted to so often in the states; if it does not cause the Legislative and Judicial departments of the government to rectify their own inadequacy, should at least move the people to search for the cause and apply the needed remedy.

But where indeed is the source of all this evil? Where are we to look for the germ? I said above that the fault lies with the people. So it does, but it must be brought to a more definite point. - It lies with the voters. - More definite still. - It lies with the floating-vote.

Elections are conducted by parties. The party in power and the opposition have about the same number of well informed voters, and the floating-vote controls the question of representation. In short, the floating-vote rules the Nation.

As the nature of our Laws is dependent upon the characters of our representatives, so it is also dependent upon the

abilities of the people that elect the representatives: and a consideration of the floating-vote will be needed in order to arrive at any just conclusion.

The floating-vote, (representing every conceivable type of the human race) the predominant feature of which is ignorance, is composed to a great extent of laboring men, men dependent upon days-labor or odd jobs for an honest but scanty livelihood. There are men whose work is such that little time is allowed in which to read if they have any inclination in that direction. They work through their laboring hours and spend the rest of their time sleeping or in some drinking-house. They retain their position till they become tired or are discharged for inability or drunkenness. They have no feelings of self-respect or honor. They know and care very little concerning the government, so long as they are not interfered with in what they consider their personal liberties. Their knowledge is limited to that at which they work. Their

reasoning powers are poor, and they can therefore be easily influenced.

There is another class that can not really be said to work. They gain a livelihood by any means what-so-ever that may come in their way, honest or dishonest. A great many of them with a fair education, none of them property holders, and all of them loafers in the general acceptance of the term. They were either born with the idea that the world owes them a living, or they have adopted it as the one best suited to their indolent habits. Unprincipled in the extreme, destitute of every virtue that should characterize an American voter, they are like the other class, totally unfit to have even a voice in the government.

But this floating-vote is not entirely composed of American born citizens. The principal drawback to our system of representative government is our foreign element. It is true that in the old colonial days it was necessary to offer easy

naturalization to foreigners, in order to populate the country, that we might be better able to maintain our rights against other nations. At present a five years residence in the United States is required before an alien can become a citizen. The mode of naturalization requires, first, that the alien shall make, at least two years before his application, a statement, on oath, of his intention to become a citizen of the United States, and to renounce all allegiance to any foreign power; secondly, that when he applies for admission he shall declare, on oath, that he will support the Constitution of the United States, and that he renounces all allegiance to any foreign power; thirdly, that the court admitting him shall be satisfied that he has resided five years in the United States, and one year in the State or Territory where the court is held, and that he has behaved as a man of good moral character.

As the law reads, and as it was intended it should be carried into effect, it is no doubt very thorough: but as

it is really practiced, it fails completely. We have at present in the United States over 7,000,000 pure foreigners, over twelve and one-half per centum of the whole population. Each year brings us from one, to two, hundred thousand more; and it has been known to reach as high as five hundred thousand. And what are they? The outcasts of European civilization. Vagabonds criminals and paupers. They bring no money with them. They disrespect our laws. They have no conception of the government, and yet they expect to be allowed to vote. They express a willingness to remain, make their applications, receive their naturalization papers, after having sworn to support the Constitution (which they have never read and know nothing about), and they have all the rights of a native born citizen, except an ability of becoming President or Vice President of the United States: while there is nothing in the whole proceeding that would impress them with the true importance of their privileges.

Of these classes then our floating-vote is composed. On

In their hands lies the question of representation; they hold the ballots that elect; they rule the government, and yet are the first always to cry out against legislation.

Should these classes be allowed to vote on such matters or not? If not, then the question is, whether or not they can be fairly dealt with. That they are, and have been allowed to vote has already proved detrimental to this government. It would not be considered wise to send one of them to Congress and only occasionally is one of the most intelligent of their number sent to the Legislature; yet they are allowed the controlling voice as to who shall go. Thus we flatter our selves, that the innate principles of a representative government are being complied with; and then, that they are being represented fairly. If their wants are of such a serious nature that they require special legislation; then those wants are so complicated that the prevailing ignorance of the floating vote

would make it incompetent to choose the representative needed; and if their wants are of so little importance, that a representative chosen by such ignorant people, would answer, then those wants do not deserve the consideration of such dignified assemblies as our legislative bodies should be. And in either case the lower classes should not be allowed to vote on questions that concern state or government. The purpose of our Constitution is not that each class may have a representative; but that by representation, the wants of all may be better considered. And the right to vote was given to all classes, not because it was supposed to be a natural right of all; but that it was supposed to be the best way by which proper representation might be secured. Consequently, when the desired end has been hindered rather than attained, by the lower classes having been allowed to vote, and a restriction of the ballot seems the only available and possible remedy; should not the ballot be restricted?

The plan of educating them may seem at first to be of some importance; but how could it be applied better than it is at present? Compulsory education is impracticable, and our Free-school system affords every opportunity to them; yet they have not been benefited thereby. Besides, how can any educational system affect them, when hosts of worthless ignorant foreigners are being added to their number year by year.

What is there to be proud of in a nation whose very life is maintained by the rabble? On what do we base the dignity of our laws, that have no better origin? We want statesmen for law-makers, not hirelings. We do not want imbeciles for voters; we want men. Men educated to a full appreciation of the true worth of the ballot; men who fully realize the needs of society and government; men of principle, honor and integrity; and to accomplish this, the ballot must be restricted. The lower classes must be disfranchised. As long as this is not done, and the reins of government are intrusted to the ignorant and incompetent, so long will the life and prosperity of the government be in jeopardy.